

Tiffany, a worshipper of Elvis, especially treasured every account of The King standing in line at Wal-Mart or window shopping along Rodeo Drive or peeking through his front door screen. It was proof to her that he was alive and well and looked as handsome and slender (at least in the fuzzy, touched-up, 300 times enlarged photos that accompanied each article) as when he first appeared on the Ed Sullivan show.

Humans with extra body parts were also among her favorite subjects — especially people with more than one head. Not real Siamese twins — that was a boring medical reality done to death on the Sally Jesse Raphael show — but individuals with only one body and two or more heads. Or better yet, one head and two or more bodies, although that was distinctly more rare. She even believed the story about the farmer's wife who gave birth to a litter of pigs.

Now it's the Kennedys — raping innocent young women and running around their Palm Beach compound drunken and disorderly, dressed in nothing but t-shirts and ankle socks. This was the last straw for Sally, a staunch Democrat and ardent Kennedy fan. Now she refuses to talk to Tiffany, for fear of giving her the slightest encouragement. Says Sally, grateful to be among the more enlightened reading public, "I never believe ANYthing unless I see it in People magazine."

TO REACH THE COMMON FOLK

If I live to be 100 (and I will),
my children have promised to mail my photograph
to Willard Scott, the jolly, people-person
weatherman on NBC.

When my picture appears on the screen
Willard will gleefully announce:
"Now, here is CATHERINE LYNN of Long Beach,
California — 100 years young
and isn't she a pretty lady!"

But no one will see a shriveled crone,
package birthday bow in her carefully permed hair,
dressed in something ill-fitting that her
grandchildren picked out for her,
stooped and confused and trying to smile
as her bleary, watery eyes
are blinded by the camera flash.

I will be sitting ramrod straight
in my favorite antique chair,

wearing my flowing lavender hippie dress
and dangling purple shell-shaped earrings.
My hair will be naturally gray,
shoulder-length and wild,
the way I like it.

I will be bright-eyed and alert,
smiling broadly in spite of my worn-down
coffee-stained teeth
and my Map of Europe face.
Greenpeace, Save the Whale, Ban the Bomb,
and Vote Democrat buttons
will be pinned to my lapel
and I will be holding aloft
a copy of my best-selling,
Pulitzer-Prize-winning collection
of straight-forward, easy-to-understand poetry
that every literary critic in the free world
has proclaimed to be the turning point
in making poetry reading
as popular among the masses
as afternoon soaps
and MTV.

NATURAL SELECTION

It happens every Spring —
adult birds build their nests
in the branches of the giant juniper trees
outside my bedroom window.
The trees are heavy-branched and hanging —
unmoored to the house in any way.
They sway and thrash about
with every gust of wind.

From April to June we find
tiny nestlings scattered across the yard
like a field of soft brown dandelions —
shivering, not yet ready to fly,
stunned from their fall,
as the parent birds circle frantically above,
unable to help.

We used to carry them into the warmth
of the kitchen, wrap them in towels,
and force-feed them warm milk
with medicine droppers.
But they always died,
and the children would weep
and make graves for them
with markers of crossed sticks
and mounds of garden wildflowers.